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THE UNDERGROUND SEA; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Subterranean Cruise in His Submarine Boat.

By "NONAME."



Quick as a flash the young inventor acted. He rushed forward, and with his hatchet dealt the creature a blow just back of the head. It was well directed and given with great force.

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THE UNDERGROUND SEA;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Subterranean Cruise in His Submarine Boat.

A MARVELOUS STORY OF STRANGE ADVENTURE.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "To the End of the Earth in an Air-Ship," "Lost in the Great Undertow," "The Chase of a Comet," "From Tropic to Tropic," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

"MEBBE you don't believe it, skipper, but as sartin as my name is Captain Dan Robbins, it's the truth. I've sailed the sea fer nigh onto forty years, been master of a sailing vessel fer thirty-five, and I know what I'm talkin' about. Belay me, if I don't!"

And captain Dan emphasized his declaration by bringing his right fist forcibly down into the palm of his left hand.

Then he hitched up his trousers and spat out a huge chew of tobacco. He always did this when excited.

Frank Reade, Jr., could not help but smile at the old man's eagerness.

"So you are pretty sure of all that, Uncle Daniel?" he asked.

"If I ain't, then I'm not Dan Robbins, thet's all, mate!"

"But I have never heard any such wonderful phenomenon spoken of in any work of science or geography."

"Don't keer if ye never did. I hev, and I've seen it! Durn these geographies and scientific charts! If I was going to sail fer Chiny to-morrow, I'd trust to the currents and trade winds an' my own nose, and get there—thet's my davy!"

Frank Reade, Jr., the young inventor, seated at a table in his private office in Readestown, gazed searchingly at the old sea captain who sat opposite to him.

Captain Robbins had called upon him for a certain purpose, and that purpose is of interest to the reader.

The captain had read a startling report in a newspaper, that Frank Reade, Jr., had invented a new submarine boat.

"What?" gasped the old salt. "A boat that kin travel under water? Well, I'll be keelhailed! They'll have ships sailin' in the clouds yit!"

Then an idea occurred to the captain. He was well acquainted with Frank Reade, Jr., and losing no time, set out for a visit to him.

What the object of this important visit was we shall soon see. It was certainly an unusual one.

It seemed that Captain Daniel was, ten years previously, master of a sealing vessel in the Behring Sea.

Driven by a storm to the Kamtchatka shore, they sought refuge in what appeared to be a fiord, or protected bay, among the high cliffs.

Not until they were well into the bay did they notice a tremendous current which was toward the land. It was too strong for a tide, and moreover, the tide should have been at ebb.

It was not long before they made the startling discovery that the current ran under the face of the cliff with great power.

There was not space enough in height for the ship to sail under, but as the captain declared to Frank:

"I make my reckoning that the sea extends under the land there, perhaps to the center of the earth for aught we may know. What sort of place it may be I can't say, but I know that there's only one kind of a craft in the world that can go there, and that's a boat what kin sail under water. That's the long of it, mate, and all of it."

It is needless to say that Frank Reade, Jr., was deeply interested.

He had been studying up some sort of a wonderful cruise for his

submarine boat, and here certainly was something worthy of his mettle.

He had no reasons for doubting the old captain's word.

"Then you really believe in the existence of such a thing as an underground sea, Captain Robbins?" he asked.

The skipper nodded vigorously.

"I do," he said.

"If your promise is true it is a wonderful discovery. In all the records I have never found any account of an underground sea."

"Well, in my opinion there is one," declared the captain, confidently.

"It has been proved that large reservoirs of fresh water exist deep under ground," said Frank. "They are frequently tapped for artesian wells. But that a large sea should exist there seems wonderful indeed. I am more than interested; I am resolved to look into this matter with you, Captain Robbins."

The old skipper danced a hornpipe.

"Great whalebones!" he cried, wildly; "that's the sort of reckoning I like. We'll jibe, and I'll bet my cargo on it! Hooray for a trip to the underground sea!"

Like wildfire the report of the contemplated project spread abroad. The little city of Readestown and the country about was in a state of great excitement.

The project was discussed in all circles, and particularly by scientific men.

The question of the possible existence of such a thing as an underground sea was much mooted. But Captain Daniel was cocksure.

Readestown was located upon the banks of a navigable river which ran down to the sea.

The machine works of Frank Reade, Jr., were connected with this river by means of a canal and a lock.

In the yard was a large tank or reservoir of water, and in this floated the submarine boat.

Frank Reade, Jr., had spent much time and study in the construction of the wonderful craft.

It had been a long time before he had succeeded in mastering all the necessary details of the new invention.

Indeed few believed that triumph would reward his efforts. It was universally regarded as impossible to devise a craft which could travel under water.

"How is he going to govern it?" asked one man, skeptically. "It may be easy enough to propel it back and forth, but how will he make it sink and rise to the surface at his pleasure?"

Frank had easily mastered this problem.

By means of a reservoir, calculated to maintain the equilibrium of the boat at any depth, this was accomplished. As water was taken into the reservoir the boat began to sink. A system of hydraulic pressure and valves enabled the reservoir to be emptied very quickly, and as it emptied the natural buoyancy of the boat carried it upward.

The method of propulsion under water was the same as on the surface, by means of a pair of screw propellers.

But the greatest obstacle to overcome was the question of air for the submarine voyagers.

This was indeed no light matter to consider. Of course unless the air in the boat was constantly replenished the occupants must die.

For a long time Frank studied the subject. Then his natural ingenuity enabled him to win the day.

He combined certain chemicals which by condensation and evaporation would manufacture the best of oxygen.

Then he built a huge generator in the hold of the boat and connected it with tubes and pipes extending to all parts of the vessel. The generator was so constructed that the poisonous gases or impure air were attracted and destroyed.

This kept up in the boat a constant and free circulation of pure air. This would enable life to be sustained indefinitely in the boat while it was under water.

The greatest obstacle of all had been surmounted. The rest was easy.

Frank constructed the hull of the boat of thinly rolled steel. It was somewhat cylindrical in shape.

A deck extended over all, well guarded with rails. In the center rose a large turret, with a platform midway in its course.

Doors opened out upon this and also on the deck. The windows were dead-eyes and heavily guarded.

Forward was the pilot house where broad plate glass windows afforded an extensive view.

Above it was a powerful searchlight. This was a valuable adjunct. In the main body or hull of the boat, midway, was a huge observation window.

From any part of the lower cabin one could look out over the bed of the sea, with its wealth of marine wonders and treasures.

The Search, which was the name given the boat, had an extremely sharp bow and a steel ram.

So much for the exterior of the submarine boat.

The interior was even more wonderful to view than the exterior. It was the crowning triumph of the inventor's genius.

Of course the submarine boat must have a motive power.

Owing to the fact that the Search must travel under water, of course steam could not be used.

But Frank was not at a loss to find a substitute.

Electricity was his favorite study and in a very short while he had succeeded in perfecting some electric engines which were the wonder of all beholders.

These were capable of running the submarine boat at a terrific rate of speed, and could be used under the surface as well as upon it!

They were located in that part of the boat just amidships, and just under the cabin. Connection was had with the key board in the pilot house by means of electric wires.

So that one could sit in the pilot house and steer and regulate the speed of the boat with ease.

Over the engine room was the long cabin. This was a marvel of beauty and elegance.

Frank had spared no expense in fitting this up. There were rich tapestry hangings and carpets, elegant furniture and adornments.

The woodwork was all of mahogany and other expensive woods. It was a bower fit for a queen.

Then there were the state-rooms luxuriously furnished and the dining saloon with the galley just back.

There was also a *salle des armes* or small gun room and arsenal where all kinds of weapons and ammunition was kept.

Everything about the Search in its material or its fittings was of the best and most expensive kind.

The boat had also stood a successful trial in the tank.

Frank had invited a large party of friends to dine with him at the bottom of the tank.

There, in thirty feet of water, in the glare of electric lights, the party had wined and dined to their hearts' content.

It was truly an experience none of them ever forgot.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE SEA.

BUT now that we have carefully examined the new submarine boat in detail let us pass on to the exciting incidents of our story.

Frank had made up his party to search for the Underground Sea as follows:

Frank Reade, Jr., the owner and inventor of the boat.

Captain Daniel Robbins, the man who knew just whereabouts on the coast of Kamtchatka the entrance to the sea was located.

Barney O'Shea, a shock-headed, ready-witted Irishman, who had been long a favorite employee of Frank's, and who was a skilled mechanic.

Pomp, a diminutive but lively negro, who was a compatriot of Barney's, and who could not be excelled in the culinary line.

Four people therefore the party was to contain.

Applications by the hundreds were received, but Frank said:

"Four of us will accomplish more than fourteen. I shall not enlarge the party."

"Which is correct, mate," agreed Captain Daniel. "I admire your decision."

The Search was finally completely equipped and ready for the start.

When the day came and she glided down the canal into the river, a great crowd saw her off and cheered her to the echo.

In due time she reached the ocean. Frank at once set the course southward for Cape Horn, which it was necessary to round.

Barney and Pomp were right in their element, and could hardly control their exuberant feelings.

"Golly! but I've jes' consumed wif curiosity fo' to see dat ar underground sea," cried Pomp; "does yo' s'pose dar am any whales in dat ar place, I'ish?"

"Begorra, yes will have a foine chance to foind out, naygur," replied Barney. "Shure if there is it's moighty little swimming yez will do."

"Golly! yo' am right dar, I'ish," agreed Pomp. "I amn't no Jonah, an' yo' kin bet yo' life on dat."

"Whurroo! Yez needn't be afraid. If a whale should swallow yez he'd moighty soon sput yez up agin."

"Don' yo' be sassy, Mistah."

Barney guffawed.

"Phwat wud yez do about it?"

"I pooty quick show yo'," and Pomp shook his head like a young bull. But this did not subdue Barney's rashness.

"Oh, yez can't frighten me, naygur," he roared. "Av yez want a ruction cum on wid yez."

"Golly, I make yo' sick!"

And Pomp made a dive for Barney. The Celt dodged.

But Pomp turned quick as a flash and rushed at the Irishman again. This time he took Barney fair in the small of the back.

The Celt was lifted clean off his feet and slid along the deck like a bolt from a catapult.

He was only saved from going clean overboard by the rail with which he collided.

But Pomp with his exertion fell flat upon his face. This was Barney's opportunity. Recovering himself quickly he leaped upon the ducky.

Then followed a lively tussle. Panting, puffing and groaning, the two jokers wrestled about the deck in the most desperate manner.

How it would have ended it was hard to say, but Frank suddenly appeared upon the scene and they scurried away in lively fashion to their duties.

Captain Daniel could not absent himself from the pilot house.

Like the true sailor that he was he was deeply interested in the boat's sailing powers. Indeed, so interested did he become that in a very short while he was easily able to master the secrets of the key board.

This learned, Frank allowed him to half the time manipulate the boat while Barney was put at other duties.

When the Search had reached a point some miles southeast of Martinique Frank proposed paying a trip to the bed of the ocean.

Thus far they had sailed on the surface for the fact that the boat could sail faster there than beneath the waves.

But Frank reckoned that the bed of the ocean at this point would be interesting ground to explore.

So it was decided to descend.

All went into the cabin.

Frank touched a spring which caused all the doors and windows to hermetically close and seal themselves.

Then he opened the reservoir valve.

There was a rushing sound of water, and then the boat began to settle.

Down very gracefully she went beneath the surface. The light of day went out.

But Frank touched another spring and a flood of electric light illumined everything.

The rays shot far out into the dark waters, showing the darting forms of fish peculiar to the surface.

Down, down sank the boat.

It seemed as if she was sinking an interminable ways. Then suddenly the bottom of the sea came into view.

It unfolded to the view of the submarine travelers like a new and strange country of unexplored sort.

A forest of seaweeds looked like some mighty jungle in which larked the strangest and most rapacious of monsters.

A mighty cliff of stone with incrustations of coral had the appearance of the gateway to a submarine hades. Wonderful indeed were the sights beheld in the deep sea.

The submarine boat rested upon a bed of pure white sand which was interspersed with rare and beautiful shells.

All these things were taken in by the voyagers with deepest interest and not a little wonderment.

"By hookey!" exclaimed Captain Daniel. "I'd never have believed that it was so pooty as all this in the deep sea! And only think how few there are know on't or hev seen it!"

"You are right," agreed Frank, "the wonders beneath the ocean must fully equal those on land."

"Begorra, it luks as if wan cud walk out there just the same as if it was air instid av wather," said Barney.

"Golly! I fink yo' wud berry soon fin' out de diffrunce!" declared Pomp.

"Yet it is by no means impossible to walk out there with comparative safety," declared Frank; "at least I can do it."

"You can!" exclaimed Daniel, with a half incredulous air.

"Yes," replied Frank quietly.

Captain Dan stared. Yet he was not prepared to believe but that anything was possible for this wonderful man who could invent a boat which would sail under water.

"Hang me fer a harpooner, but I kain't see how you can do tha mate!"

"Well, I can," declared Frank; "but I should have to put on a diving suit of my own invention."

"Oh!"

The skipper drew a long breath. Yet he could hardly see that this was very logical. How could the air lines and the air pump be man- aged on board the submarine boat?

But Frank brought one of the diving suits out.

It was quickly seen now how they could be used. They were a new invention of Frank's, and much different from the ordinary diving suit.

They consisted of rubber suit, helmet, and in place of the life line there was upon the diver's back a chemical generator and reservoir.

This generated pure air upon the same principle as that which was used aboard the boat.

An automatic arrangement kept up the circulation so that there was always pure air in the reservoir.

It was a wonderful invention.

With it one could travel anywhere in safety upon the bed of the sea for an extended period.

Captain Daniel was delighted with the diving suit and was anxious to test it. But Frank said:

"We will try it later."

But just at that moment Barney turned the search light to the right of the cliff.

This revealed a long stretch of sand and a black object in the foreground.

"A wreck!" cried Frank.

"A frigate, as I'm a sinner," cried Captain Daniel. "Some old-time war vessel, I'll bet my grog."

It was indeed a vessel of the olden type, and might have laid a hundred years or more in those sands.

It was well covered with sea weeds and the drift of time so that only by its shape would it have been known as a vessel.

Our submarine voyagers were of course at once interested. The old skipper looked inquiringly at Frank, saying:

"Those old frigates sometimes carried a heap of treasure!"

Frank was silent a moment.

Barney and Pomp were waiting for orders. Just the kind to suit them came.

"Lift the boat twenty feet or more, Barney," commanded Frank.

"Lay nearer to the wreck. Let us take a little better look at her."

With alacrity the boat sprang to obey the order. The submarine boat was shifted a grain nearer to the wreck.

All then were enabled to see that in her day she had been a noble craft. Her open ports still showed the outlines of the cannon muzzles frowning forth as they might have in many a hard sea fight.

Frank went to a locker and took out a couple of the diving suits.

"All right, Captain Robbins!" he said, "if you want to take a walk over to the old hulk put on this suit."

The captain was delighted and made no delay in complying.

Barney and Pomp were to remain and guard the submarine boat in the meanwhile. But they did not demur.

Captain Dan was certain that they would find chests of gold aboard the frigate. But Frank was not so sanguine.

They entered a small vestibule between the cabin and the deck. The doors were closed and a valve opened.

The vestibule filled with water. Then the two divers opened the deck door and went out into the sea.

It was a queer feeling which the old captain experienced for a few moments, caused by the pressure of the water.

But he soon became accustomed to it.

Then the two divers clambered down from the deck and set out for the frigate across the white sands of the ocean floor.

CHAPTER III.

A COLLISION.

But before they reached their destination quite an exciting incident occurred.

Frank was in the lead and the old captain was not far behind. All was exceedingly light and plain in the glare of the search-light.

Suddenly Captain Daniel beheld a terrifying spectacle.

From the jungle of sea growth some distance to his right he saw a strange monster dart forth.

It was half fish, half crab and had terrible cat-like eyes with a baleful glare fixed full upon him.

Moreover the huge creature had started without doubt for the captain with the certain idea of making him a victim.

"Great whales!" cried Captain Daniel reaching for his hatchet, "I don't want to get too familiar with that cuss!"

It was useless to shout to Frank Reade, Jr. The only way the divers could make themselves heard under water was by placing their helmets close together and shouting loudly.

Frank was now some ways ahead.

The captain saw that it was useless to attempt communication with him before the monster would be upon him.

So he instinctively prepared himself for a plucky defense. He gripped his hatchet handle tightly, and waited for the monster to get near enough to receive a blow.

The marine monster swept down upon the captain with wide-open, hideous jaws. It had short, stout claws not unlike a lobster's.

The captain knew well what it would mean to get pinched in one of these. So he attempted to avoid them.

And at the same moment he made a terrific blow at one of them with his ax.

The keen blade partly severed the right claw. The pain for a moment caused the monster to recoil.

The commotion in the water had now attracted Frank's attention, and caused him to turn about.

He gave a thrilled start when he saw the situation. The next moment would have seen the captain in serious trouble but for him.

For the sea monster, evidently furious with pain, made a dart forward, and struck the old captain with his other claw.

Robbins went down half stunned. He would have then been an easy victim for the sea monster, but for Frank's timely intervention.

Quick as a flash the young inventor acted.

He rushed forward, and with his hatchet dealt the creature a blow just back of the head. It was well directed and given with great force.

Blood spurted out into the water, and for a moment the sea devil writhed in agony.

Then it lay an inert mass upon the sands.

Frank's attack had been successful, and the sea monster was dead. The life of Captain Robbins had been saved in a timely manner.

The two divers made joyful signs over the victory. Barney and Pomp on board the search had seen the whole affair.

Barney had been upon the point of charging upon the sea devil with the submarine boat, but the happy termination of the affair settled that necessity.

It had been a close call for Robbins.

But the lives of both divers were spared, and they could not but congratulate each other.

Once more they started for the frigate.

This time they reached it in safety. They were able to clamber easily into one of the open ports.

Of course it was dark as a pocket inside the sunken vessel.

But upon the helmet of each diver was a powerful electric globe which dispelled the gloom for many yards about.

By the aid of these they were enabled to explore the vessel with ease. And what they did discover was wonderful indeed.

They were upon the gun deck of the old ship of war.

In spite of decay and the debris which time had heaped up everywhere, it could be seen that the frigate had probably gone down in action.

There were dismounted cannon, their carriages having long ago rotted away. Great gaping holes in the deck, shattered beams, and every indication that a bloody battle had once taken place on her decks.

The door of the magazine was open. There was a heap of what might once have been powder.

Beyond the two explorers passed to the berth deck, and then down into the cabin.

Here all was decay and ruin. Little was left to betoken what its furnishings might have been.

But in the center of the cabin was a table.

On this lay several half rusted swords. Frank took up one of these and read a dim inscription upon the gold handle:

"HIS MAJESTY'S SHIP VENTURE.

"A. D. 1780."

Below this was the English coat of arms. The blade broke from the handle so rusted was it. But Frank preserved the hilt.

He placed his helmet close to the old captain's and shouted:

"She has laid here a good while, has she not?"

"You're right, mate!" replied the old skipper. "I thought from her cut she was one of King George's vessels."

"It looks as if she was sunk in a sea fight."

"Certain! Perhaps she ran up against some Yankee privateer and got the worst of it."

"I believe it. These waters were doubtless the scene of many a battle between the Yankees and the British."

"There ought to be some gold aboard her. All frigates carry more or less."

"We will look for it."

The cabin was thoroughly explored, but nothing of any value beyond a few coins was found.

And indeed search as they would the two divers were unable to locate any treasure.

There was but one conclusion to draw.

Either she carried no money or else she had been looted before she sank. The latter assumption was the most likely.

However this was, nothing remained of the crew, not even the semblance of a skeleton.

Time and the action of the water had long since obliterated all.

They had now been absent some while from the submarine boat. So Frank made signs that it was time to return.

The old skipper reluctantly left the wreck.

It was his hobby to find an ocean treasure. But this attempt had certainly proved futile.

They were soon on the ocean floor once more and on their way to the Search. Barney and Pomp were at the observation window watching for their return.

Reaching the deck of the submarine boat they quickly clambered aboard. They were soon in the vestibule with both doors closed.

Frank then pressed a valve which forced the water from the vestibule by pneumatic pressure. Then they removed their diving suits and entered the cabin.

Barney and Pomp welcomed them with delight.

"Golly, Mars Frank!" cried the darky, "I done fo't yo' was done

fo' when dat ar big monster got aftah yo'! Dat was a berry narrow escape!"

"Indeed it was!" agreed Frank. "I thought Captain Daniel was done for that time."

"I thought so myself!" said the old skipper. "I owe you my life, mate, and I'll repay the debt some time be sure."

"It is nothing!" replied Frank. "I am only too glad to have been able to save you."

Barney at Frank's order now pressed the reservoir lever.

"Good-bye to the deep sea," cried Frank.

Everybody rushed to the observation window as the Search went swiftly upward through the water.

Up and up she went.

Suddenly there was a terrific shock. Everybody was prostrated, and for a moment stunned.

Then the light of day was all about. Frank was the first to regain his feet and beheld an astonishing spectacle.

They were alongside a strange looking vessel. It was black hulled, rakish and of schooner build.

Its rail was thronged with dark-featured, angry-looking men. Frank saw that the strange vessel also carried a number of guns.

For a moment the young inventor was at a loss to understand the situation. Then it dawned upon him.

He threw open the pilot-house door and sprung to the lever. But he was too late.

The schoormen had already cast heavy cables over the bow and stern of the submarine boat.

She was held fast.

Frank saw that no ordinary effort could break these. So he adopted another move.

"Great whales!" gasped Captain Daniel, who had now recovered.

"What's all this, mate?"

"We are alongside a Brazilian privateer," declared Frank; "evidently she belongs to the insurgent side and—"

"Thunder and guns!" roared the captain. "She's no right to hold us up on the high seas!"

"Whether she has or not," replied Frank; "we are held up!"

"Show 'em our flag. Confound the blockheads!"

"I fear that will do little good," said Frank. "They are little better than pirates, and don't care a whit for international law."

"But—confound it! How did we get such a shock?"

"It is evident that in coming up from the depths we struck their hull."

"I should have thought it would have made 'em turn turtle?"

"Not necessarily," replied Frank. "It was probably a glancing blow. But, hello—there's a parley!"

A man with a speaking trumpet, was already at the schooner's rail. Frank at once opened the cabin door and stepped out.

"Buenos, senior," came the hail in Spanish. "What craft are you, and where in the name of the Virgin did you come from?"

"This is the submarine boat Search," replied Frank. "What craft is that?"

"This is the Gonzalez, privateer of the Republic of Brazil," was the reply, "and we call upon you to surrender as a prisoner of war!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIVATEER OUTWITTED.

FRANK was astonished at this curt and abrupt declaration.

"Surrender!" he repeated.

"Yes, surrender, Senior Capitaine. You see, we have you at our mercy. Four guns are already trained upon you."

Frank grew angry.

But he replied coolly:

"Are you not a bit previous? What do you take this boat for?"

"Some infernal torpedo craft in the employ of our foes," was the reply. "You cannot evade us."

"Well, you are muchly mistaken," replied Frank. "This is an American craft. You meddle with us at your peril!"

"Madre Dios! An American?"

"Yea."

The privateer captain looked as if he was disposed not to believe this. He hesitated a moment, and then said:

"I am coming aboard."

"All right," replied Frank; "but I warn you not to meddle with us, or you will get your government into trouble."

The privateer captain's men had placed a gangway between the two vessels. Down upon this they now clambered.

A moment more and the privateer captain with several of his men sprang upon the deck of the submarine boat.

They carried drawn swords, and matters looked troublous.

But Barney and Pomp stood just inside the cabin door with Winchester.

Frank stood coolly with folded arms, waiting for the invaders to act.

The privateer captain bowed with extravagant politeness to Frank and said:

"Pardon, senior! We must look over your ship. If you are truly Americans, as you say, we shall apologize."

"Then you will not accept my word?" said Frank.

The privateer captain shrugged his shoulders and muttered some indistinct comment.

Frank said no more.

He knew that there was little use in resisting the demands of these

men. Much the better way would be to pretend to accede, and then trust to some stratagem or trick to outwit them.

So he said:

"Very well, captain. You shall look over our boat!"

The privateer captain bowed and Frank led the way into the cabin. He showed the boat's log, its marine license and other papers to prove that it was an American vessel.

Captain Garlitta, which was the privateersman's name, appeared well satisfied that the Search was an American boat.

He bowed politely and accepted all of Frank's statements suavely. Then he went on deck again with Frank.

He took a sweeping survey of the craft and a plain light of admiration shone in his eyes.

He turned to Frank and said again in Spanish:

"Did not Senior tell me this was a submarine boat?"

"I did," replied Frank.

"And she will travel below the surface as well as upon it?"

Frank nodded.

"Per Dios!" exclaimed Garlitta. "What a fine addition she would be to our navy. With her we could blow up every one of the opposing navy. Pardon, senior!"

Garlitta turned and placed a hand on Frank's shoulder.

"Well," said Frank.

"What will you sell your submarine boat for?"

"Sell it!" exclaimed Frank.

"Si, senior! Our government will give you valuable bonds to a large amount for it. With your boat we can win victory. Is not that a great deal?"

Frank was aghast.

He realized at once the true seriousness of the situation. He made haste to make reply at once.

"Senior Garlitta, I will never sell my boat. I do not intend that it shall ever be used for purposes of war."

The Spaniard's brow darkened.

"Caramba!" he exclaimed. "We will charter it then. Cannot you see? We need your boat to give us victory!"

"That is not the point," replied Frank. "America stands neutral in the Brazilian war. We will not lend aid to either side. This is an American craft. It cannot fight for either side!"

Garlitta gave an impatient exclamation and then took a turn up and down the deck.

Frank stood regarding him coldly. The young inventor read his game, but was not exactly prepared for meeting it.

Suddenly Garlitta turned.

"Then you positively refuse to sell or charter your boat?" he asked.

"I do!" replied Frank.

"Then!" cried the Spaniard, "I must forcibly seize it in the interest of our cause. Lieutenant—call the marines!"

"Hold!"

Frank white and angry faced the Spaniard with clenched hands. His blood was up.

"What foolery is this?" he cried, forcibly; "dare to carry out such an infamous project and you will hang for it. You have no right to detain this boat even for one moment. I warn you to return to the deck of your ship and cast off your grapplings or it will be the worse for you."

For a moment the privateer captain quailed before Frank's wrath. But he was a reckless fellow, and was in for trouble.

He was determined to carry his point regardless of consequences.

He knew that he was committing an act of piracy upon the high seas, but he believed he could escape punishment.

How would the truth ever be known?

He would take good care that none of the crew of the submarine boat should ever tell it.

So he shrugged his shoulders and whipped out his sword.

"Senior Capitaine!" he said, "this is one of the necessities of war. We need your boat. You will not sell it or charter it. Therefore we must take it."

"You will never do that!" declared Frank, grimly.

"How so, senior?"

"You shall see!"

"Pardon. You are under arrest."

"Not yet!"

Frank leped back suddenly through the cabin door. The Spanish privateersmen were leaping down onto the deck.

Garlitta and several of his men tried to stop Frank.

But they were too late.

The young inventor sprang into the pilot-house. He pressed an electric button, and every window and door was hermetically sealed.

"What are you going to do, Frank?" asked Captain Daniel.

"You will see?" replied the young inventor, grimly.

"Dang me for a mossback!" said the old skipper, "but I never liked a Spaniard. They're a lot of sharks! Shall we give 'em a broadside, Frank?"

"Golly, Marse Frank," cried Pomp, who was with Barney at the cabin windows. "Open de window an' we jes' gib dem hot shot yo' bet."

"No!" replied Frank, "I have a better scheme. I'm going to slide them off the Search's deck like a heap of flies!"

As he spoke he pressed the reservoir lever.

He kept his word.

In the excitement of boarding the Search, the privateer gunner had left their guns.

It was Frank's chance.

He knew that twenty feet under the water, the cannon shot could do the Search no harm.

Down went the submarine boat. Her grappling ropes held her and prevented her from going to the bottom at once.

But as she plunged beneath the water, Garlitta and his men were left floating like corks in the water.

So astonished were the privateers by the sudden move, that all they could do was flounder about and half drown.

Indeed, they might have drowned, had it not been for the gangway to which they now swam.

What was more, the weight and force of the submarine boat drawing upon the grappling lines, threatened to swamp the privateer.

There was not a moment to lose, and the crew of the Spanish ship were obliged to cut away the lines to save their ship.

Thus freed from the grappling lines, the Search went down almost to the bottom.

Then Frank ran her a mile or more under water before venturing to the surface.

When they did come up the Spanish ship was seen far away across the watery waste.

A puff of smoke and a distant boom betokened the anger of Garlitta, but the shot never reached them.

"Hooray!" cried Captain Daniel, exuberantly. "We met the enemy and gave them a cool slip. Dang my fingerhead! No Spaniard ever yet could get the foul water of a Yankee. They'll take our back water now, I reckon high!"

"We got out of the scrape luckily!" declared Frank.

"You're right, mate!"

"If those fellows had stayed by the guns we could not have done it."

"Just what I believe. That was our chance to squeak. But darn my timbers! It did me good to circumvent them black-skinned Spaniards!"

"Begorra, it's chasing us they are!" cried Barney.

The Spanish ship was crowding on all sail.

"Well, they are more than foolish," laughed Frank. "How can they expect to overhaul us?"

"Golly! I done flink I'd gib dem a lily bit ob a run!" averred Pomp.

"And so I will," declared Frank.

He put on all speed, and the Search fairly flew through the water. The effect was seen at once.

The Spanish privateer was left behind so rapidly that she was soon but a speck on the horizon.

Then darkness shut down, and that was the last seen of her.

That evening in the cabin Frank and Captain Daniel held a long confab over the underground sea and its possible extent.

The old captain clung to his belief that it extended under a good part of Asia.

But Frank was skeptical.

"I hope that you will not be disappointed, Captain Dan," he said, "but I fear your underground sea will prove but a curious inroad of an ocean current under a high cliff."

The old captain said grimly:

"Keep well up with the wind, mate. We'll see when we finish this voyage what we'll see!"

CHAPTER V.

IN THE UNDERGROUND SEA.

To attempt to depict the details of the long voyage around Cape Horn into the Pacific would require too much time and space.

Suffice it to say that the Search arrived there in due time, and set a northward course for the upper Pacific.

Across the Equator for the second time the Search sailed.

There were many inducements to stop at island ports on the way.

The temptation was strong, but the explorers kept their one purpose in view and did not deviate.

To find and explore the underground sea was the purpose.

Frank knew the capacity of the delicate electric engines, and knew that it was limited.

He knew that such a long trip must necessarily create much wear and tear. It was hardly likely that she would be able to go another trip even if she successfully withstood this one.

So he was anxious to reach the coast of Kamtchatka as quickly as possible.

In this desire Captain Daniel was a partner.

"Hang my forelock!" he cried, excitedly, as he consulted the chart one day, "it's great progress we are making, Frank. We shall soon be in the Kamtchatka current."

"Progress should be rapid then."

"You're right, me hearty! We'll just slide right down into Behring Sea and then for the entrance to the underground sea."

Everybody was now on the qui vive.

As the days passed, and it became a question of hours, the suspense was intense.

The great barren coast line of Kamtchatka was visible on the horizon.

Captain Daniel was at the wheel now, all the time studying the course they were making.

These waters were familiar to him, for many a voyage had he put on the sealing grounds.

The submarine boat stood in nearer and nearer to the coast.

Captain Daniel sighted two great cone-shaped rocks, and cried exultantly:

"There she is! Well I remember the big rocks. They are a gateway. We sail between them into the finest and biggest harbor you ever saw."

Frank was interested.

As the Search drew nearer now to the entrance to the underground sea he went into the bow and attentively watched the current.

It was easy to see that it ran in toward the big bay. So strong was it that its motion could be easily felt as it carried the Search along.

The huge gateway to the harbor was a curiosity in itself.

The waters rushed rapidly through a deep channel between the two great domes of solid rock. Beyond was the expanse of the harbor.

Here the current was very perceptible.

The boat shot forward as if in the grip of some mighty power, as indeed it was.

Straight across the mighty bay of surging water the submarine boat was carried at a good rate of speed.

Then Captain Daniel pointed straight ahead and cried:

"There are the big cliffs. The water runs under them. Now, mate, shall we go in on the current or do ye want to look about a bit first?"

"Reverse the engines," said Frank, "let us take a look at the cliffs first."

This seemed the wisest and best move to make.

Frank had no idea of running blindly into a dangerous maelstrom or too strong a current which might dash the boat to pieces.

So the submarine boat was kept steady and against the current while it drew nearer the cliffs.

It did not require much study for Frank to discover that in one respect Captain Daniel was right.

There was certainly a large body of water flowing under the cliff. How far it extended could not be seen but Frank judged that it must be many miles.

After awhile he said:

"Captain Daniel, I am more than ever inclined to believe that you are partly right."

"I thought so," said the old skipper rubbing his hands briskly. "I knew you would come to my terms. I tell ye, mate, there's a big sea under there!"

Frank stepped into the pilot house.

He placed his hand on the keyboard.

"Well, if there is we will soon be sailing in it."

"What are ye going to do?" asked the skipper.

"I am going down," said Frank.

"To the bottom?"

"Yes."

The next moment there was a jolting and sliding motion caused by the strong force of the current as the boat went down.

The electric lights flashed up.

The bottom could be seen fathoms below and showed drifted banks of sand caused by the powerful current in its passage under the cliff.

Frank allowed the submarine boat now to be carried along in the current at its will.

Every moment it sped further and further underground. They were surely entering the underground sea.

It was an exciting experience.

Hours slowly passed.

Still the boat kept on at the same steady rate of speed. But Frank after awhile noticed that this was decreasing in a steady manner.

The current was growing more slack. After a time it became hardly perceptible.

Then he set the rays of the search-light flashing through the depths. The bottom of the underground sea was not unlike that of the ocean itself.

There were the same class of marine plants of curious fish and plant life. Coral abounded.

But what Frank was most interested in was the question as to what was overhead.

Were they in a mighty subterranean chamber of the earth's center, with a rocky dome above?

Or did the water fill its underground cavern to repletion? Frank was determined to know this.

So he let the submarine boat mount upward.

Up, up it slowly went. Suddenly there was a division of the waters and Frank impulsively cried:

"We are on the surface!"

This was seen to be true.

All rushed to the observation windows. What they beheld was really wonderful. They regarded it spellbound.

The underground sea lay placidly upon every hand.

As far as the rays of the search-light could extend this was unbounded. But overhead, at various heights, was a rocky dome.

The underground sea was in reality the mightiest of earth's caverns, a hollow center in the earth, in which water found the same level as the ocean.

That there was an outlet as well as the inlet, there was no doubt.

The roof of the mighty cavern hung dark and sullen overhead. The search-light swept along its surface.

Of course Captain Daniel was very triumphant.

"I told ye so," he cried. "I knew ye'd find it! Now, what do ye think of my yarn, messmate?"

"Captain Daniel, you were right," agreed Frank. "And this is the

greatest discovery of this century. An underground sea! It is a wonderful thing to think of!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp. "Am dis de center ob de earth, Marse Frank?"

"Indeed it would pass for that," agreed the young inventor; "it is as near that much talked of locality as human beings will ever get, I am thinking."

"Bejabbers, do yez 'spose there are any inhabitants in this part of the world?" asked Barney.

"I hardly think there is, unless they are amphibious," replied Frank. "I can see no land."

"But for all that, mate, we may find some!" declared Captain Daniel.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "Do you really fancy that there is such, Captain Robbins?"

The old skipper shifted his quid.

"I don't know why there shouldn't be," he replied; "about every corner of the earth is inhabited by some sort of a race of human beings. It wouldn't be so very strange if this place proved no exception."

"Indeed that sounds logical," agreed Frank. "Well, we will keep our eyes open and trust to luck. It would be the capping of a grand achievement if we should discover a new race of people down here!"

"Golly!" cried Pomp, as he stood on his head, "dat would jes' be fun enuff."

"Begorra, we wud be a reglar lot of Christopher Columbuses!" shouted Barney. Then he and Pomp closed for a friendly wrestle.

The submarine boat sped on over the Underground Sea.

A good lookout was kept on every hand. The searchlight was sent in every direction.

It was speedily found that they were afloat upon no small body of water.

Two days passed, and the submarine boat must have sailed fully two hundred miles in the wonderful Underground Sea.

The waters were always as smooth as glass.

They could have been navigated by the lightest canoe. The Search was as buoyant on the surface as a cockle shell.

It was not until the third day of their entrance underground that it occurred to Frank to attempt the setting of a definite course.

It was then that he made a horrifying and astounding discovery.

Owing to some inexplicable natural cause the needle of the compass had lost its dip to the north.

It was impossible to set a course, make a reckoning, or get the bearings.

It was a most extraordinary situation.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Frank, "we are lost!"

He explained the situation to Robbins.

The old captain was dumfounded.

"Great Jewsharp!" he exclaimed. "We are on a reef now! We never can find our way out of here!"

"Never!" agreed Frank.

It was an appalling reflection.

For some while Frank tried to study a way out of the difficulty. He discussed it with Captain Robbins in the cabin for a long while.

The only conclusion arrived at was that the best and only logical course was to keep on and trust to Fate to bring them out of the place.

If they never found an exit then they must spend their lives in the bowels of the earth.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YACHT.

It would never be possible again to enjoy the sunlight and gladness of the upper world.

They were entombed alive upon a mighty body of water. Escape seemed most uncertain.

However neither Frank nor the captain were the ones to give way to despair or useless recrimination.

They were in the scrape; had gone into it openly, and had nobody to blame but themselves. There was therefore no way but to find a sure and certain way out of it.

So the matter was dropped.

No attempt was made to guide the Search.

She was allowed to go on at random, and for aught they knew might be traveling all the while around a great circle.

There seemed to be very little tide or current in the Underground Sea.

There was no depending upon any of these things for a clew as to the way out of the place.

Also it was impossible to say where the boat was really going.

This might be the very center of the earth, perhaps hundreds of miles below the surface.

All these thoughts and many others came to the voyagers.

There was no denying the fact that they had a chilling effect. A sort of gloom hung over all.

This it was vainly endeavored to dispel by Barney and Pomp.

The Irishman brought his fiddle on deck, and danced and sang as only a true Hibernian can.

And Pomp produced his banjo and gave plantation selections. For a time the cloud would lift.

Then it would settle down again heavier than ever.

Thus matters were when a crop of incidents came along in swift succession to change the face of matters.

Pomp one day was on the forward deck when he spied a dark object out upon the surface of the water.

"Golly!" he muttered. "What am dat? It looks like a boat."

"A boat!" exclaimed Barney. "Share, yez are dhramin', nay-gur."

"Don' yo' be so suah, I'ish. I tell yo' it am somefin berry much like one!"

And Pomp was right.

Barney turned the search-light full upon the object. It was a drifting boat. Two oars lay across the thwarts.

Frank and the captain came tumbling out of the cabin at the summons.

The submarine boat was run alongside, and the dory, for such it was, was picked up.

It had nothing in it to explain its presence on the underground sea. But Frank found upon the rowlocks the stamp of a San Francisco manufacturer.

The name upon the boat's thwart was "Ariel."

This was all.

But Frank had already formed his hypothesis.

"This is some yacht's boat," he declared. "And was probably brought in here from the ocean by a strong current."

"How long do ye reckon she's been floating here?" asked Captain Daniel.

"Not many weeks," replied Frank. "She may have been in the water a month."

"But her crew—"

Frank shook his head.

"That is one of the puzzles which may never be solved!" he said, "it is a mystery of the sea!"

"They are probably in Davy Jones' locker."

"It may be!"

The boat was placed on the deck of the Search. But Frank had a faint belief to which he clung.

This was that possibly the craft to which the boat belonged might also be in the underground sea.

If so, how could she enter without descending into the depths as the Search had.

This was a puzzle.

However, all that could be done was to await developments and this the voyagers were fain to do.

But they were not long in coming.

A cry from Barney brought all into the pilot house. The Celt was pointing far out over the dark waters.

Beyond the range of the electric light there was a faint star of light. It twinkled and scintillated curiously.

"Phwat the devil do yez call that?" cried the Celt. "Shure it lugs to me like a star."

"A light!" cried Frank excitedly. "We are not the only voyagers on the underground sea! Set a course for it, Barney!"

"All right, sor."

Straight for the distant star of light the submarine boat went booming. Every moment it loomed up nearer.

Then the search-light showed a dark object, the sight of which created the most intense excitement.

"Jericho!" gasped Captain Daniel. "As I live it's a sailing craft!"

This was seen to be an astonishing fact. The outlines of the hull and the masts of the craft could be plainly seen.

A sailing vessel upon the waters of the underground sea!

What did it mean?

Frank was dumfounded.

Was it a visitor from the ocean as the submarine boat, or was it a craft belonging to some unknown inhabitants of the subterranean regions of the earth?

The latter supposition Frank was disposed to give little credence to.

The former seemed untenable. If the sailing craft had entered the cavern world from the outer ocean, it was certainly not by the same entrance that was employed by the Search.

Else the masts and rigging could not have remained intact.

Here was a mystery.

"Will ye hail her, skipper?" asked Robbins, in a tremulous voice.

"Why, certainly," replied Frank.

He went out on deck.

As they drew nearer the yacht, for such the craft was, he saw that lanterns were placed in the chains.

These made the light seen by the crew of the Search. Had it not been for these attracting lights, much of this story might never have been written.

"Yacht ahoy!" shouted Frank.

There was an interval of silence.

The yacht was doing nothing but drift on the glassy sea. There was no breeze to fill her sails.

Then there came a sudden stir, and a vibrating voice came back:

"Ahoy!"

"What craft is that?"

"Mercy on us! Is there another craft afloat in this terrible place? This is the yacht Marguerite Ariel, of San Francisco."

"And this is the submarine boat Search," replied Frank. "How on earth did you get here from San Francisco?"

"God only knows, for I do not," replied the yachtsman. "It is a

a mystery. But we had given up all hope of ever seeing the outside world or fellow creatures again."

"Keep your craft steady and we will come alongside."

"Ay, ay!"

The search-light showed the Marguerite to be a handsome yacht of the schooner type.

Her decks were well kept, but the only occupants were a tall, slender, handsome youth and a very beautiful young girl.

Both were finely dressed and evidently of a rich class.

The Search ran alongside and a line was thrown over the yacht's rail.

Frank stepped to the deck of the yacht and held out his hand.

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown, U. S. A.," he said. "Whom have I the honor of meeting in this out-of-the-way part of the earth?"

"I am Chester Floyd of San Francisco," replied the youth. "This is Miss Muriel Phair of the same city."

Frank was somewhat puzzled.

Two young people like these adrift on a yacht in such a place was certainly sufficient problem to tax the curiosity of any human being. He bowed before the young lady, and then Floyd read his thoughts at a glance, and hastened to say:

"We are the only occupants of the yacht, Mr. Reade."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, in sheer amazement.

"I do not wonder that you look surprised. But we did not come here in the Marguerite alone. It is a somewhat thrilling story."

"I will be pleased to hear it," said Frank, "and then I will tell ours."

"Very good!" replied Floyd. "I will be brief. Two months ago we left San Francisco for Vancouver."

"We were there to meet Mr. Phair, Miss Muriel's father, who owns large mines in British Columbia. This yacht is his property."

"I need not say that Miss Muriel is my betrothed wife. Our wedding was to take place at Vancouver."

"But after leaving San Francisco we had thrilling experiences. Our captain—Jack Clifford—fell out with his crew. They quarreled, and in the melee he was hurled overboard and drowned."

"There was nobody else competent to sail the yacht. But one of the topmen—Bill Harding—undertook the task. For weeks we sailed on in a direction which seemed to me to be away from Vancouver instead of toward it."

"I ventured to approach Harding on the matter, and he confessed that the crew had no idea of returning to Vancouver, for they feared the law."

"They had been sailing the boat for a point in the Aleutians where they all intended to go ashore and seek safety in Alaska. This was an appalling revelation to me."

"In vain I tried to reason with them. They would not heed me. We kept on into the northern sea."

"Then I grew desperate and resolved to attempt to bring them to terms. I appeared on deck with a brace of revolvers and announced my determination to take the boat to Vancouver."

"This brought matters to a climax. That I could not carry my point against such odds I speedily saw."

"But it resulted in a proposition upon their part. They would take the yacht's boat and pull for an island visible in the distance, leaving me to navigate the yacht home as best I could."

"Which, of course, would be a flat impossibility for me, for I am not in any sense of a sailor. But while we were arguing the matter a squall came up."

"The squall grew into a hurricane and darkness came on. In all my life I have never experienced such a storm at sea."

"Under bare poles the yacht ran, we knew not whither. Only once in the night we plainly heard the roar of breakers. Then the sea died down, we were swept forward in a powerful current."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEA OF FIRE—A SUBTERRANEAN CONTINENT.

THE young yachtsman paused a moment to clear his throat. Then he went on:

"It was a long while before we discovered that daylight was not to come, and that we were in some underground basin of water."

"The yacht also lay at the mercy of a current and could not be navigated. At first the crew were too much surprised to act."

"Then when they found that the yacht could not be navigated they decided to take to the boat and trust to good fortune in finding their way out again into the open sea."

"Muriel and I, however, decided to remain on board the yacht. And here we are. This is my story."

For a moment after young Floyd finished there was a dead silence.

Then Frank pointed to an object on the deck of the Search.

"You say your crew left the yacht in a boat?"

"Yes," replied Floyd.

"Was the yacht's name on it?"

"Ariel, yes!"

"Is that the boat?"

With an exclamation the young yachtsman went forward and examined the boat.

"Yes!" he said in sheer amazement, "but how came it here?"

"Well," replied Frank, "we found it adrift and picked it up!"

"Was nobody aboard?"

"Not a soul."

Floyd gave a gasping cry.

"What can that mean?" he cried. "Where are the crew? Can it be that they are drowned?"

"I cannot answer that question," replied Frank, "but it certainly looks very strange."

"It is a mystery," averred Floyd.

There was no present solution of the mystery available. So for the time the matter was dropped.

Frank invited Floyd and Muriel aboard the Search, and Pomp prepared a stunning meal.

After this was out of the way, Frank said:

"What do you propose to do, Mr. Floyd? Will you remain aboard your yacht?"

The young yachtsman gave a start.

"I see no other alternative," he said. "Unless I can make an agreement with you to come aboard your boat. I presume you will not care to accept us as passengers."

"I don't know about that," said Frank slowly. "Indeed I see no other alternative for you."

"You don't mean it!" cried Floyd excitedly. "Will you really take us, then? Oh, we shall never forget your kindness!"

"Indeed we shall not!" said Muriel.

"What do you take me for?" said Frank, gruffly, "do you think I would allow you to remain aboard that yacht from which you could never escape? The yacht cannot be navigated. The submarine boat can. Of course we are not sure of finding our way out of this underground sea, but I think we stand a better show than your yacht."

"Of course you do!" cried Floyd excitedly, "this is a kind act, Mr. Reade!"

"You will probably be obliged to say good-bye to your yacht forever!"

"I cannot help that. Our lives demand it."

"That is true. If you have anything on the yacht which you wish to preserve, bring it aboard. We shall cut loose as soon as possible."

"Then your visit to this place is solely for the purpose of exploration?"

"Yes."

"And you were enabled to see the place by which you entered? What was it like?"

"We had to enter under water," replied Frank. "You could not have come in by the same entrance."

"Then there must be more than one method of entering this underground sea?"

"There may be a dozen means of entrance and exit. For the latter we will search later."

"I am satisfied."

The two castaways hastily transferred their effects to the Search. Then the handsome yacht was cut loose to float perhaps to the end of its career upon the bosom of the underground sea.

The Search, with its new passengers, glided away over the dark surface of the sea.

The mystery of the disappearance of the crew of the yacht was however uppermost in the minds of all.

"On my word, I believe they all jumped overboard," affirmed Captain Daniel.

"What would impel them to do that?" asked Frank.

The skipper scratched his head.

"Give it up, mate," he said. "It's powerful queer anyway."

"I agree with you," said Frank. "But I have a theory."

"That's the kind of talk. What do you call it, shipmate?"

"There is no indication that the boat capsized or that the crew were violently thrown out."

"No."

"Now perhaps they found a landing place somewhere. They may have got out upon it, neglected to fasten the boat, and it drifted away."

The skipper was thoughtful.

"Mebbe so," he agreed; "but how does it happen that the boat is found so near the yacht? There's no land in sight as yet."

Frank could make no answer to this. All he could say was:

"Well, we'll see about it."

Nevertheless, he clung to his fancy that somewhere in the underground sea land would be found.

This became one object of his quest. He kept a sharp lookout.

The Search was a fast sailer.

She covered miles of the underground sea in very quick time.

Thus far she had remained on the surface.

Chester Floyd and Miss Phair, the rescued lovers, were in joyous spirits. It had indeed been a close call for them.

There was now a chance that they might escape from their underground prison and see home and friends again.

This was their hope and aim. Yet they were both deeply interested in the exploration of the strange underground world.

For a world it really seemed, though thus far it had been a world of Stygian gloom.

But a change was near at hand.

The search-light in its path dispelled this gloom. But upon either side it was impenetrable.

But suddenly low down upon the water line a distant line of light was seen.

It was unlike the light of day but seemed like a curious and wonderful display of Aurora Borealis. The voyagers regarded it with wonderment and curiosity.

"What in the name of Jonah is that?" asked Captain Daniel in

mystification. "It's a curious looking thing as ever I saw. Are we gittin down to the infernal regions?"

"If so, then we had better be making our peace," said Frank with a laugh, "but it looks to me like a subterranean fire!"

"Perhaps it is some underground volcano or a sea of fire!" ventured Floyd.

"Indeed that is a logical surmise!" agreed Frank. "We will soon discover the truth."

"But will you dare to venture so near the place?"

"Why not?"

"But—if it is an active volcano or anything of the sort will there not be some risk in going too near?"

"I do not intend to take any undue risk," declared Frank, "but at the same time I mean to explore that region if I can. Send her along faster, Barney!"

"All roight, sor!"

It is needless to say that every voyager deeply interested was on deck. Every moment the apparent flames drew nearer and more visible.

It seemed as if the whole sea was one flaming mass. The light shot up in great tongues of apparent flame to the roof of the cavern.

On went the Search, even to the very verge of the burning sea. Then the phenomenon was explained.

The apparent fire was nothing more nor less than the creation of some powerful phosphoric agent by a natural process.

This was disseminated through the waters and gave them the appearance of being consumed by fire. The light was a powerful one, and made objects as plain as in day.

The submarine boat glided out upon the blazing sea which now lay upon every hand.

It was a strange spectacle and an odd experience.

Certainly none in the party had ever seen its like. They gazed upon it spell-bound for a time.

Then followed a discussion as to whether the phenomenon was caused by chemical agents in the air or the water.

Captain Daniel maintained that both contributed to the visible end gained, and all finally agreed with him. It was certainly a magnificent sight.

"The underground sea of fire!" cried Floyd; "truly this is something more than one reads about in a story book!"

"I believe we are the first human beings to see it," said Frank.

"Which is certainly an honor!"

"It is at least a distinction."

"You are right."

The Search sailed on over the burning sea for a while.

It seemed a relief to have all so light about them. They sat on deck and chatted gayly.

For some hours they enjoyed the voyage over the sea of fire. Then Barney suddenly cried:

"Begorra, Mither Frank, there's an end av this place!"

The Celt pointed to a dark line which had suddenly risen in the distance.

Frank cried:

"The end of the illuminated sea! That is the dark sea again!"

But Captain Daniel cried:

"Land, ye lubbers! I tell ye it's land! Hooray! There's land in the underground sea after all!"

"On my word!" exclaimed Floyd, "it looks like a coast!"

"We'll see," said Frank.

He strode to the search-light and turned it on. The intense glare of the electric light told the tale.

It certainly was land.

A coast line in the underground sea. There was the shore upon which washed the waters and cliffs beyond.

The voyagers were much excited.

One thought was in the minds of all. Were there strange people in this strange part of the world? Was it, like the upper world, inhabited? Only an exploration could tell.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRANGE DISCOVERIES.

NEARER every moment drew the submarine boat to the strange continent underground.

Pomp was sent forward with a sounding line.

But he reported good depths until the Search was within a hundred yards of the coast.

The electric light was all the while kept upon it in a full blaze. The coast was of course barren and devoid of vegetation.

Whether this was true also of the interior, only time could tell. All were anxious to land.

There were some small portable boats aboard the Search, but there was also the Ariel's boat, which was a good sized one.

Into this Frank, Captain Daniel, Barney and Floyd got.

It was arranged that Pomp and Muriel should for the while remain on board.

Then the boat was pulled away for the subterranean shore. It was soon high on the sands.

All were armed, though. There was no sign of a foe. Yet it was deemed safer.

The subterranean continent was as light as day, for the glare from the phosphoric sea extended to the cavern roof so far above.

Up the cliff the explorers climbed.

When they reached the summit a curious view was spread before them.

As far as the eye could reach all was a desolated waste of sand and stone.

There was little vegetation beyond fungus growths and slimy weeds. The former were curious in size and shape.

Some of them took the form of trees, and grew to the height of ten feet or more. In places there were perfect forests of these.

But living creatures did not seem to abound on the subterranean land. Nor was there any sign of human beings.

The explorers went on from one point to another, looking for signs of human or animal life.

It was not until they had traversed fully a mile that they received any sort of a clew.

Then suddenly Floyd who was in the lead came to an abrupt halt and grasped Frank's arm.

"Mercy alive!" he cried. "What horrible thing is that?"

"The sea serpent!"

"Beyond doubt!"

"Look out for him!"

"He is very dangerous!"

These were the excited cries given by Frank and Floyd. But Captain Daniel cocked his rifle, and shouted:

"Give him a broadside quick, or he'll be aboard of us!"

"Begorra it's the devil an' he's afther us!" cried Barney wildly.

The object of all this excitement was truly a very strange looking creature.

It lay extended over full seventy feet of the subterranean soil and his scales shone like silver.

In appearance he was not unlike a monster python with the exception that his body was flatter and less round. Also the creature's head was broad and it had two prodigious fins on either side back of the gills.

The declaration that it was really the sea serpent was not an untimely one, or out of place.

That this famous saurian is a certain reality many old sea captains have averred.

But the genuine sea serpent is presumed to be several hundred feet in length. We will assume therefore, that this fellow was one of the serpent family, but a smaller specimen.

After all who knows but that the sea-serpent is nought but a monster eel.

In any event, whatever its character our friends had no desire to make its close acquaintance.

They were none too far from it for safety and this led Floyd to suggest moving back.

Captain Daniel's suggestion to give it a broadside was not at once acted upon.

The truth was, Frank and Floyd wished to study the characteristics of the saurian a little first.

Again it was possible that it had no vulnerable point for a rifle ball. In which case it would be extremely dangerous to fire upon it.

That it had seen the voyagers was evident.

Its crested head was reared aloft, and it moved it excitedly to and fro like an adder about to strike.

It is needless to say that our friends kept a good watch upon it. They did not intend to be caught off guard.

Carefully they changed their position.

"By jove!" exclaimed Floyd. "What a monster he is! I have never seen such a saurian in any part of the world."

"He certainly is a curious specimen," agreed Frank. "Yet I do not consider him wholly serpent."

"Oh, you do not?"

"No. I regard it as a cross between an eel and a serpent. Properly I think it belongs to the eel family."

"Well, I am inclined to agree with you," declared Floyd after some thought. "Hello, he is making a move!"

The reptile's mighty body began to glide forward, and now its head was reared higher than ever.

"What! Is he coming to attack us?" cried Floyd in alarm.

"Give him a broadside!" cried Captain Daniel energetically. But Frank said:

"Take careful aim, and put the bullet either into his eye or behind the ear. Those I believe are the most vulnerable spots."

Each took slow and deadly aim. Then the rifles spoke.

The result was thrilling. For one moment the snake reared its head with a terrific hiss, and then dropped it again as suddenly.

It lay an inert mass, and Barney with a yell sprang down the slope toward it.

But before the Celt reached it there was a transformation. The saurian suddenly raised its head and made a dive at its human foe.

They were none too quick in getting out of the way. A moment more and they would have been counted victims of the subterranean serpent.

Barney with a yell turned a back somersault and rolled out of reach. Then he gained his feet and started for the spot where his companions were.

This settled the question at once and fire was opened upon the serpent. The bullets had effect.

But not until the monster was shot full of holes did anybody venture to approach him.

Then he was critically examined. Frank's theory that the monster was more fish than reptile was borne out.

Floyd was in favor of skinning the serpent, but it was soon found that this would be a long and hard task, so it was abandoned.

But this was not to be the only incident of the exploring tour.

The little party skirted the deep basin and came once more to the shore of the subterranean sea.

Here in the sands Barney suddenly espied some curious-looking marks. He examined them closer and then cried:

"Begorra, here's the fut-prints av some wan!" he cried.

"Foot-prints!" ejaculated Floyd.

In a moment all were by the Celt's side. It was then seen that he spoke the truth.

There in the sand were human foot-prints. It was a most startling revelation.

It would seem to establish the undeniable fact that the subterranean continent was really inhabited. The foot-prints led along the beach and were of four persons.

All were bare-footed and their feet were of normal size, exactly like those of the ordinary human being.

But this was but a slight clew or guide as to the real character of the strange natives. They might be giants for all that.

At once the explorers were consumed with a feverish interest and desire to see what the subterranean natives looked like and how they lived.

They had now been absent from the submarine boat over an hour. All exchanged glances.

"How is it?" cried Floyd. "Shall we go on or back?"

"Let us go on, mates!" cried Captain Daniel, who was always slow to abandon an enterprise.

"Begorra, so I say!" declared Barney.

All eyes were upon Frank.

The young inventor hesitated.

"It may be that we will get into trouble," he said. "Stop and think of that. These natives may be very hostile."

"We don't care for that!" cried Floyd eagerly. "Come on, Mr. Reade. We have weapons to defend ourselves with."

Frank yielded. The party at once set out rapidly for the interior, following the trail through the sands.

It led away from the sea and through a deep cut in sandstone cliffs.

For a time it was hard to follow it clearly, but the end was much nearer than they fancied.

Beyond the cut there was spread to view a broad plateau with high cliffs back of it.

Here was a spectacle that gave all a tremendous thrill. For a moment they stood spellbound.

There, before them, revealed in all its entirety, was a city, which occupied nearly the whole plateau.

There were long flat-roofed buildings of sandstone, with long avenues and streets and broad squares.

"The city of the subterranean people," cried Floyd, finally.

"What a wonderful sight!"

"This is the spectacle of a lifetime," cried Floyd, "and we are the favored ones permitted to see it!"

"For which we oughter be thankful, mates," declared Captain Daniel.

But Frank, who had been scanning the spectacle closely, said:

"Can you see any signs of the people?"

"The people," exclaimed Floyd. "Why, they ought to be visible from here!"

Then all gave a start and exchanged startled glances.

"On my word," said Floyd, finally, "I really believe that the subterranean city is a deserted one!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATE OF THE YACHT'S CREW.

EVERY appearance seemed to bear out this natural conclusion.

There was not a living being in sight.

The streets of the subterranean city were as quiet and noiseless as death itself. Not a single sign of life was apparent in any spot.

The buildings it was seen now were in a state of ruin.

The explorers waited for no more, but approached the city rapidly.

They reached the broad gate in its wall and passed through. They were in a mighty collection of ruins.

The buildings were crumbling to decay, and fungus was over everything. Curious lizards and toads were in every crevice.

Certainly this was a death city. It could be likened to nothing else.

The explorers passed on along the deserted streets.

Nothing remained to attest the character of its former inhabitants; yet the footprints they had followed led down to this city.

What did it mean?

Were there a few survivors residing in the place yet? If so what had become of the vast population which must have existed here once?

Had they found an outlet and migrated to the world above?

Or, as was more probable, had warfare or a pestilence cut them off? These were hard questions to answer.

But while ruminating upon these possibilities and probabilities an incident occurred which cleared up the mystery.

Suddenly Barney picked up an object and exclaimed:

"Begorra, phwat is this? Shure, it luks loike a knife!"

It was a sailor's clasp knife. At once the interest of all was aroused.

Barney passed the knife to Frank, who, in turn, showed it to Floyd. The young yachtsman gave a great start.

"On my word," he cried, "that is Jack Marvin's knife. He is one of our crew!"

He then pointed to the initials cut in the horn handle. This was a literal revelation.

It literally put a new face on matters. Frank looked at Floyd, and the same thought was in the mind of each.

"What do you think of it?" asked the young inventor.

"It looks to me as if we were following the trail of our own men," replied Floyd.

"I believe that is true."

That the footprints they had been tracing were those of the missing crew of the yacht there would seem to be little doubt.

This then terminated all hopes of finding survivors of the extinct race of subterranean people.

That they had perished long ago with their city there was no doubt. It could all be seen plainly enough now.

The crew of the yacht had pulled in the boat as far as the subterranean land. They had gone ashore, and the boat had in some manner been washed away by the tide and carried in a current to the spot where the submarine voyagers had found it.

They were therefore doubtless somewhere in hiding in the subterranean city. It was in order to search for them.

Not one in the party but was eager to do that.

"I don't know as I have room for all hands aboard the submarine boat," said Frank, "but we'll try it."

So the search was begun for the castaways. Shots were fired and other means employed to attract their attention.

But all this seemed of little use. No reply came back.

Through the streets of the city the explorers rapidly made their way. But search as they would no trace of the missing crew could be found.

What did it mean?

Had they left the ruins and wandered away to some other spot? It was not impossible.

"If they are in this city of ruins they are in hiding," declared Floyd, "or they would certainly answer us."

"It would seem so," agreed Frank. "Yet it may be that they prefer to remain by themselves."

Floyd was angry.

"If that is the case," he said, "it would almost be proper to let them go to their doom."

"Not so bad as that," said Frank. "We must not forget that they are human beings, you know."

"Yet they showed themselves almost devoid of humanity."

"That is true, but for all that we must try and rescue them."

So the search was continued.

It ended in a tragic discovery, which terminated all hope for the castaways.

One of the streets led the party on until they came to a tremendous heap of stone and debris in the middle of the street.

It was easy to at once see the cause of this.

"Hello!" cried Frank; "here is a building that has collapsed!"

"That is true," cried Floyd, "and it looks recent."

"It is recent."

"Do you suppose—"

He ceased speaking. At that moment, with Frank Reade, Jr., he caught sight of an object which nearly froze his blood.

It projected from beneath a heap of the stone. It required but a glance to recognize the white upstretched arm of a man.

In a moment Floyd was pulling away the stones and mortar from the buried man.

A glance was enough, however. It could be easily and plainly seen that he was dead.

"It is Marvin!" declared Floyd, with instant recognition. "On my word that was a hard death."

"Don't you suppose the others are under that heap of ruins also?" asked Frank.

"I dare say."

"Shall we look for them?"

"Yes!"

In less than an hour the four bodies were recovered. It was easy to see how they had lost their lives.

Walking along the street, without warning the old ruin had fallen. Of course it buried the luckless sailors and was their end forever.

It was a tragic end for them, and made a deep impression upon the submarine voyagers.

But there was no other way but to give them burial, and return as quickly as possible to the Search.

Graves were dug and the men were buried side by side on the subterranean continent, which was to be their final resting place.

Then it was decided to return at once to the Search.

"We can do nothing more here," said Frank. "There is no doubt but that the subterranean continent was at one time inhabited, but something wiped them out of existence, and only the ruins of their city is left."

"Just it, exactly," agreed Floyd. "I am willing to return for one."

"Begorra, I think we'd better not sthay here too long, or we may be after catching the disease ourselves," cried Barney.

Captain Daniel picked up his rifle.

"Come on, mates," he cried. "I'm with ye on this vy'age!"

So they set out upon their return to the submarine boat. In a short while they came to the spot where the huge serpent's remains were.

This recalled the thrilling episode of a short while previous. It was not far from here to the spot where they had come ashore from the Search.

As they reached the verge of the cliff all looked for the search-light of the submarine boat.

But its rays were no longer visible.

But even this excited no feeling of alarm, and it was not until they had reached a spot from whence they could see the expanse of water that the fearful chill came over them.

Their first impulse was to sweep the sea closely for a sight of the Search.

But they were unrewarded.

It was not visible anywhere.

"Where is the boat?" cried Floyd.

Then all stood statue-like in silence for some moments. This was broken by Frank, who said hollowly:

"My soul! she is gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Captain Daniel.

"Begorra, phwat is the meaning av that?" cried Barney. "Shure the naygur wud niver go fer any common thing!"

"That is right," cried Frank, "something unusual must have happened."

"Perhaps she is under the surface," ventured Floyd.

"What would she be there for?" asked Frank.

There was no solution of the mystery apparent. A fearful gloom spread over the explorers.

What had become of the Search?

That Pomp had proven recreant to his trust was not to be believed. That something had occurred to remove the boat which it was beyond his power to control was most certain.

Had she gone down for good? Had some current carried her away to another part of the sea? Or—what?

In vain the explorers cogitated over the matter.

They never came anywhere near a proper solution of the profound mystery. It was simply an appalling fact which confronted them, viz: the submarine boat was gone.

Words cannot express the true force of the realization.

There they were upon the mystic subterranean continent in the very bowels of the earth, doomed to remain there perhaps forever.

Doomed perhaps to end their existence in that terrible underground world, away from the beautiful sunlight and the free air of God's own country.

Was it not horrible to think of?

No wonder ghastly pallor overspread the faces of all. No wonder that their hearts grew cold,

The damp malodorous air was extremely oppressive. Surely there could be no health in living among all the dampness and fungi.

A fearful groan burst from the lips of Chester Floyd.

"My God!" he said. "What shall we do?"

"We have got a boat, messmates," said Captain Daniel, "I reckon we might try and find our way out of this condemned hole."

"That would be impossible," said Frank, "starvation would be almost sure to overtake us first. We might wander for years without finding an outlet to this almost limitless underground sea."

CHAPTER 2.

POMP'S PREDICAMENT.

Not one in the party but felt the force of Frank's words most forcibly.

They knew well enough the utter hopelessness of their position.

To be sure they might put out in the small row-boat, but it would seem safer to remain on the land.

There was one hope to which all clung, and this was that Pomp would yet show up with the Search.

His inexplicable absence, however, had a most depressing effect. However, Frank Reade, Jr., seemed equal to any emergency.

He at once began searching for the means of sustaining life.

He began to dig in the sands of the shore and found a species of shell fish quite palatable.

There were also fish contiguous to the shore which could be ensnared or netted.

So that altogether there was some chance for the supporting of human life. Springs of cold water were plenty in the cliffs.

This action upon Frank's part had the effect of somewhat arousing the others from their lethargy.

"Well," said Floyd finally, with a deep breath, "I suppose we have got to do the best we can."

"Correct, mate!" cried old Captain Daniel; "that's the kind of orders I like."

"Yez kin bet yez won't be shtuck while yez have Misther Frank wid yez!" cried Barney. "Shure he'll find a way out av this scrape yit."

"I have no doubt that he will," cried Floyd cheerily. "We must not forget that we have a famous inventor in our midst."

But Frank said modestly:

"I trust that you will not depend too largely upon me, friends. But I shall certainly do all I can to get us out of this scrape."

So in somewhat improved spirits the adventurers went to work to remedy their position as much as possible.

But in the meanwhile what of Pomp and his charge? Left aboard

the boat with Muriel, the darky kept a faithful watch of the shore of the subterranean continent.

Muriel remained also at the observation window continuously, keeping a constant watch for the return of her lover and the others.

Time went on.

They did not appear.

"Golly! dey am makin' a berry long stay," averred Pomp.

"Indeed I thizk so," agreed Muriel. "Can anything have happened?"

"I don't flink so," replied Pomp. "Yo' may be suah Marse Frank be brung 'em froo all right."

But what seemed ages to the watchers passed by. They were getting weary with the vigil.

So intent were they upon this one purpose that Pomp quite forgot to keep a watch in any other direction.

This resulted in a startling and unexpected incident, culminating in a disaster which soon, it was seen, would not be easy to repair.

The first intimation of any trouble was when the boat suddenly began to rock.

"Golly! wha' makes dat?" gasped Pomp, springing to his feet. "Kain't be no gale comin' up yere."

He sprang to the pilot house and looked aft. The sight which he beheld chilled his blood.

"Massy sakes alibel!" he cried, "we'se in fo' it now."

Then he started for the automatic capstan to haul up the anchor. But before he had fully succeeded there came a tremendous shock, and the boat nearly stood on her beam ends.

The cause of this Pomp had seen at a glance.

Through the waters of the underground sea, a monster whale had suddenly come tearing along.

Its objective point was the submarine boat and that it meant for it annihilation was most certain.

Muriel was thrown down violently with the shock of the collision.

The whale struck the boat square under the stern and nearly turned it over in his passage under.

Pomp saw that it was necessary to make quick action.

He knew from the motion that the anchor chain was broken; then he reached for the keyboard.

He pressed the motor key. The boat shot forward swiftly.

But not quickly enough to avoid another attack of the whale. This time the monster struck the craft full amidships.

There was a terrific crash, a rattling of the machinery, and it seemed for a time as if the boat must go to pieces.

But fortunately it recovered, righted, and sped away upon a new track. This time it eluded the whale.

Pomp manipulated the rudder with the sole view of eluding the huge foe.

He knew that a few such terrible attacks must result in the total demolishing of the boat.

It was therefore necessary to at once get beyond its reach.

But to the darky's horror, the rudder would not respond.

The savage attack of the whale in the stern had in some way twisted the chain.

The boat was speeding like the wind straight out to sea. This was directly away from the subterranean continent.

And this, of course, Pomp wanted to avoid.

He knew how necessary it was not to get too far from the spot where his companions had landed, else he might not be able to find it again.

He looked back.

The whale was speeding along in the wake of the submarine boat. Suddenly it dipped and went down.

Out of sight in a twinkling it went. Pomp saw a chance to dodge the huge foe.

He placed his hand upon the motor lever to check the speed of the boat. He pressed it hard.

The boat did not seem to at all slacken its speed. Astounded, the darky gasped:

"Wha' am de mattah?"

In vain he tried to make the lever work. Each time it refused flatly to do so.

The truth was apparent.

The shock of the whale's attack had disarranged the electrical machinery in some way. The submarine boat could not be stopped until this was in some way regulated.

Pomp was for a moment transfixed with horror.

He saw the terrible possibilities of the predicament.

Every moment the subterranean continent was sliding rapidly out of view.

Straight out into the subterranean sea the boat was speeding like the wind.

For a moment the darky was completely nonplused. He was trembling like an aspen.

"Massy sakes! wha' will be de end ob dis?" he gasped.

Through his brain flashed the ready answer. The subterranean continent would be lost to view, and eventually the Search would run into the farthestmost wall of the cavern.

But that it would have to traverse many miles to do this Pomp knew. He saw, therefore, that his one and only hope lay in regulating the machinery, if it was within his power to do so.

He hoped that it was. Muriel shared his hopes.

Both were thoroughly alive to the exigencies of the case, and knew that all depended upon their coolness and nerve.

Muriel was no ordinary girl. In an extremity like the present she was as cool and courageous as the strongest man.

Pomp's first hope was to free the rudder of the twist in its chain. This done, the boat could be guided and the continent always kept in view.

He went out on deck and lowered himself over the stern. He made a quick and accurate examination of the rudder.

Then he began work.

To get at the twist in the chain it was necessary to unbolt a section of the stern plates.

This was slow and laborious work and at times the plucky darcy was half submerged in the sea.

Yet he kept at it.

Muriel did her part.

She kept up on deck and maintained a good watch of the sea through which they were so rapidly cleaving their way.

For hours Pomp worked desperately.

With feelings almost akin to despair, both he and Muriel saw the coast of the subterranean continent fade completely from view.

Naught was around them but the entire subterranean sea.

They had now crossed the border of the phosphorescent sea, and were in the midnight pall of darkness which hung over the main sea.

But the search-light made a pathway of radiance ahead showing where they were going.

It was along this pathway that Muriel sent her gaze, never allowing it to wander.

Suddenly as she was thus engaged a thrill of horror seized her.

"Pomp!" she cried, "for the love of heaven come quick! We are going full upon shore!"

"Golly fo' glory! Massy sakes!" gasped the darcy. "Yo' don't say so! Dat kain't neber be!"

There was but one desperate thought uppermost in Pomp's mind. This was to save the boat.

He instantly reached up and knotted a rope about his waist. Then down into the water he slid.

It was alongside the rudder that he slid.

He grasped one corner of the huge steel blade. Then he twisted his leg around the chain.

This gave him a leverage and he used it well. With all his strength he pulled on the blade.

It would seem to require the power of an ox to swing that heavy rudder over against those rushing waters.

But Pomp was strong.

He pulled with all the desperation he knew. The big blade slowly answered.

The water swirled and swashed about the darcy.

At times it seemed certain to overwhelm him. But he blew it from his lungs like a sea-horse and hung on.

Nearer and nearer drew the rudder blade to the stern post. The boat's head began to turn.

And Muriel standing on deck saw the boat turn from the rocky shore which would be its ruin and within one hundred yards of the treacherous reefs glide away upon a new tack.

Pomp had saved the day.

He had made a literal hero of himself. This was certain.

CHAPTER XI.

RUN AGROUND.

BUT the exertion had been a tremendous strain upon the darcy's mental and physical system.

As soon as the boat had turned he let the rudder blade go.

Then he hung over the chain for some moments completely exhausted, and uncertain whether he should give up and fall into the sea or not.

But he recovered in time to prevent so horrible a fate as this. Then he managed to creep along to the half unbolted plate over the twisted chain.

Again he began work on that.

But he and barely cleared the plate, when with a thrill of joy he saw that the chain had straightened.

It now traversed the roller as freely as ever, and would undoubtedly mind the wheel without any trouble.

Elated beyond measure he clambered on deck. Muriel met him with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Pomp, you brave fellow!" she cried. "You have saved the day. A little more and we would have been aground on those rocks!"

"Golly, missus!" cried Pomp, "Ise done glad ob dat. Wha' wud become ob Marse Frank an' all de odders den?"

"It would have been the end of all of us!" replied Muriel, "but does the rudder mind the helm now?"

"Yes, missy!"

"And—the engines—can we not check them?"

"Ise gwine to see about dat, missy!" replied Pomp, "but I jes' fought I would set de course ob de boat fast."

"Back to the continent of course."

"If we kin remember de way!"

"But the compass—"

Pomp made a gesture.

"Dat am go good!" he said.

"No good?"

"No, missy!"

Muriel was astonished.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Don't know fo' suah. But de compass won't wo'k in dis underground sea," replied Pomp.

The young girl was horrified.

"Then there is no certainty that we shall ever find the continent again?" she asked.

"None whatever, missy, I reckon!" said the darcy, "unless we jes' fin' it by de berry bes' ob good luck."

"Let us go on as rapidly as possible!" said the young girl rigidly.

It was arranged that Muriel should hold the helm of the boat while Pomp went to work on the machinery.

Pomp was luckily a born mechanic and therefore he knew just how to go to work on the machinery.

It did not take him long to find out exactly what was the matter with the delicate structure.

One of the cogs had become displaced, and the other was badly jammed. It was a hard job for one man to handle.

But Pomp procured a jack and raised the section so that the cogs were free.

Then he proceeded to drive them off with a heavy hammer and replaced them with new ones.

It was a laborious and slow job, but for all this success crowned his efforts.

In a very short while he had arranged matters so that he was sure of ultimate success.

Then he began to whistle and sing. Once he danced a clog and stood on his head for diversion.

Whether this was advisable in the matter of a waste of time or not, we will not argue, but certainly it was a relief to the darcy's overwrought nerves, and gave him a stimulus.

Finally all was ready for the lowering of the jack.

Pomp had so nicely calculated all, that the cogs fitted perfectly. He dropped the jack and rushed into the pilot-house.

A touch upon the lever was enough.

The submarine boat's speed lessened. It was once more under control. It was a victory for Pomp.

"You have performed a wonderful deed," said Muriel. "Now if we can only find the continent and the spot where they landed I shall be happy."

"I fink we can, missus," replied Pomp. "Leastwise we keep on until we kin fin' it."

"God grant us success!"

Pomp now took the wheel. But Muriel kept at the window, anxiously straining her gaze for some view of land in the distance.

They were guided by one thing which was greatly in their favor.

This was the distant line of the phosphorescent sea. A little while later they crossed the boundary.

The dark sea was left behind and the search-light was no longer needed.

Both Muriel and Pomp were now agog for a view of the subterranean continent.

It was accorded them sooner than they expected.

Suddenly Muriel gave a great cry.

"Look—look!" she cried. "There it is at last!"

"Youse right, missy!" cried Pomp, "dere it am fo' suah!"

There was no means of knowing just yet whether they would strike that part of the shore which they had left or not.

But they clung to hope.

The boat ran up as near the cliffs as possible; then Pomp began to use the search-light.

Their cue was to look for the rowboat on the beach.

If they could find that they would be all right; but a sudden horrible thought came to Muriel.

What if the abandoned explorers had taken the boat and put out to sea with it?

In that case it would be akin to looking for a needle in a haystack, with no possible hope of success.

However, Muriel would not yield to this fear.

She kept a strained and anxious gaze upon the shore. The submarine boat crept cautiously along through a narrow strait.

Suddenly Pomp flashed the search-light half a mile along the shore and cried:

"Golly, missus, I done fink dere am de bery cliffs!"

"You are right, Pomp!" cried the young girl. "It certainly looks like the spot."

The boat was creeping along through the strait. Pomp was carefully picking his way when a sudden disaster occurred.

The first intimation was a peculiar, crunching sound under the boat's keel and a vibratory shock.

Then she stood still.

Her engines continued to run and splash the water, but there was no progress.

A little sharp cry escaped Muriel. Pomp came out of the pilot-house ruefully.

"Massy sakes!" he exclaimed. "We'se done run aground!"

Muriel turned pale.

"What will be the result?" she asked. "What shall we do? Can we not get off?"

"I'se afraid not, missus," said Pomp, despairingly. "It am de berry worst ob luck dat follers us. I'se afraid dis boat will neber sail no moh seas fo' de likes ob us!"

Muriel walked to the bow of the boat and stared fixedly down the path of the search-light.

Here was an unlooked for development and one for which they were in no wise prepared.

What was to be done?

Of course it was necessary to get the boat off the reef. But was not the very first prime move to find the other voyagers if possible?

With their assistance there would be more certainty of getting afloat again.

Pomp was scratching his wool and trying to think of some way out of the scrape.

Muriel turned and said:

"That looks like the spot where they went ashore, don't it, Pomp?"

"Yes, missy."

"How far is it down there?"

"Mebbe a mile."

Muriel changed her voice.

"Pomp!" she said resolutely, "I want you to stay by the boat. I am going down there."

"Yo' gwine down dere!" gasped the darky.

"Yes!"

"But—wha' fo', missy?"

"I am going to find our lost companions if I can!"

Pomp whistled a moment.

"I done fink dere am a bettah plan, missy!" he said.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Muriel. "What is it?"

"Dis chile go down dere fo' yo'. Jes' yo' stay abo'd de boat an' watch fings. Dat be de safes' way!"

Muriel reflected a moment. Then very wisely she concluded that it would be the best to adopt Pomp's plan.

So she said:

"You are right, Pomp. That is the best way. I will remain here and await your return."

The darky was pleased. He hastily prepared to go upon his errand.

It seemed the best move.

To be sure Muriel would be left aboard the boat alone, but there was no apparent great risk in this.

There were arms aboard and she knew how to handle a rifle.

Pomp glided over the side and into the water.

It was but a little swim to the shore, and he reached it in safety.

He started at once for the spot where it was believed the explorers had landed.

He ran on rapidly.

At this rapid pace he had soon covered the mile. He was now beneath the cliffs.

And as he turned an angle a dark form stood in his path. For a moment neither spoke.

Then Pomp gave a yell:

"Hi, hi! it am Marse Frank. Bress de Lor', I hab foun' yo' at las'."

"Pomp!" cried Frank, for he it was, "hello, friends! we are saved. We are saved!"

With loud cries of joy the other explorers were instantly upon the spot.

In their exuberance they fairly embraced the darky.

It was like a glorious transition from the grim shadow of Death to the glorious sunlight of Life.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

THE reunited voyagers hastily recited their experiences, but when Pomp informed them of the position of the submarine boat, there was some dismay and fear.

"Let us go thither at once," cried Frank. "We must spare no pains to get the boat afloat!"

"What if she never floats again?" muttered Floyd.

"We won't accept that assumption," said Frank.

So all started for the rowboat. It was quickly in the water and being pulled toward the stranded Search.

As they drew rapidly nearer, Muriel saw them with a thrill of joy.

That was a happy meeting between the lovers a short while later on the deck of the Search.

They were reunited as both fondly hoped this time forever.

Frank hastened to examine the situation of the Search, and the possibilities of getting her off again.

These, he was bound to acknowledge, were by no means flattering.

The position in which she was would have been difficult even for a heavy tug to drag her off.

Frank feared that some of the jagged rocks had pierced her hull by the keel.

If this was the case, then it would seem almost impossible to save her.

But Frank would not abandon hope. His inventive genius was bound to come to the fore.

He had been in many scrapes, perhaps worse than this, out of which he had found escape. So he was determined not to be baffled.

He brought his diving suit out of the cabin and donned it.

Then he descended from the deck and was lowered to the bottom. He made his way along the keel.

With the aid of his electric helmet lamp it was easy for him to see the exact situation of the boat.

She rested full upon the jagged rocks, and one of them, sharper than the others, seemed to have indented the hull.

Whether it was a puncture or not Frank could not tell.

If it was then the fate of the Search was forever sealed,

But even if it was not such how could she be got off the reef? This was the quite serious question.

Frank studied the situation a while. Then he decided upon a plan of action.

He returned to the deck of the submarine boat. When he removed his helmet he was besieged with questions.

"How is it, Frank?" asked Floyd, anxiously. "Will she ever get off?"

"That is not an easy question to answer," replied Frank. "I shall try and tell you later."

"Give us hope!"

"Well, I think there is some hope."

This elicited a cheer from all.

Barney was now ordered by Frank to also put on a suit and accompany him.

Together they went down under the reef. This time, though, Frank carried a long coil of wire and a cylinder.

The cylinder was a dynamite cartridge, though none knew it but him.

He handled it carefully.

Frank selected a place directly under the rock upon which the keel rested.

Here was a cavity, and in it he placed a cartridge. He connected the wire with it.

Then he directed Barney to take it back to the deck.

The Celt obeyed.

A few moments later Frank followed him. When he reached the deck he connected the wire with the dynamos.

Now it dawned upon the others what his purpose was.

"Jericho!" exclaimed Captain Daniel; "is that safe, Frank?"

"Whether it is or not," replied Frank, "it is our only hope. Unless we can get the boat off the reef she might as well be sunk."

"Trust to luck!" cried Floyd. "I have faith in Mr. Reade."

"Golly, dat am whar yo' am right!" declared Pomp.

All was now ready.

It was a critical moment.

If the explosion should rent the hull of the boat, then the fate of the voyagers would be settled forever.

They would be doomed to spend their lives in the terrible depths of the subterranean world.

This was really akin to death so it can be understood how really critical the situation was. All were upon the qui vive of expectation.

At the chosen moment Frank pressed the electric button.

The result was quickly apparent.

There was a sudden shock, a muffled roar. The water boiled and heaved, the boat pitched and leaped forward.

Then it glided away a hundred yards over the bosom of the sea.

It was off the reef.

But—was the attempt a success? This could not yet be told. Frank rushed into the hold.

He placed his ear to the lower steel plating. He listened long and earnestly.

He knew full well that if there was a break in the sheathing or plating of the hull that it would become instantly apparent in the gurgling of water.

Such a sound would indicate that the boat was sinking.

The question would then be settled once and for all.

It would then be in order to get ashore the quickest possible way, for the boat would sink.

But the gurgling sound did not occur. The submarine boat floated for an hour as buoyant as ever.

The did not settle in the water a fraction of an inch. The joy of all was intense.

"That is good!" cried Floyd, delightedly, "she is good for a long cruise yet."

"I think she will take us out of here and safely home!" said Frank. "Have you all had enough of underground life?"

"Aye!" was the vociferous reply.

"Then we will start for home this very moment," declared the young inventor.

It was but a moment's work to set the engines going.

Frank set the course as best he could and allowed it to go forward at full speed.

The subterranean continent faded from view. Then they passed beyond the line of the phosphorescent sea.

It was now groping in the dark for a way out of the underground sea. But fortune smiled upon them.

Two weeks of futile wandering in the dark depths were experienced. Then one day Barney, who was at the wheel, shot the rays of the searchlight off at right angles and gave a cry.

It brought every one on deck so wild and eager was it.

"What is the matter, Barney?" asked Frank.

"Begorra, wud yez luk at that?" cried the excited Celt.

All looked.

The result was a half moon of light low down upon the water line. It needed no explanation to tell the voyagers what it was.

That it was the entrance to the subterranean sea there was no doubt. The light beyond was the light of day in the outer world.

Of course the course of the Search was changed.

Straight for the aperture in the solid dome of rock the boat sped. It rapidly enlarged.

When it became a certainty that they were to emerge safely from the dark underground sea, the crew of the Search were wild with joy.

Among the happiest of all were the two lovers, Floyd and Muriel. It was a time for rejoicing.

But the exit which the Search made was by no means the same by which she had entered.

It was doubtless the opening by which the yacht had made its entrance. When the submarine boat shot out into the open sea, the sun was high in a cloudless sky.

The spirits of all were on a keen edge.

The coast of Kamchatka extended as far as the eye could. But no human habitation was visible.

Our explorers had no desire to tarry longer in this wretched and desolate part of the world.

It was associated with too many grewsome incidents and dread disasters to hold any charm.

So course was at once set for home. It was decided to stop at San Francisco.

This would permit Floyd and Muriel to reach their home and friends. It is needless to say that they were grateful to Frank Reade, Jr.

"We owe you our lives and our happiness, Mr. Reade," said Muriel fervently. "We shall never forget it."

"I assure you it has been a great joy to me to serve you," replied Frank gallantly.

Muriel blushed prettily. It is safe to say that all her life she held Frank in high esteem.

For days the submarine boat kept on its way to San Francisco.

It was safe to say that half the distance had been covered when the final catastrophe of this eventful trip had its occurrence.

Frank had noticed for some moments a peculiar heavy rolling motion in the vessel.

The sea was not a choppy or rough one. On the contrary, it was almost becalmed.

But yet the boat acted strangely. Barney had noticed the same fact and came to Frank.

"Begorra, sor, she don't sail as fast as she has been, sor!"

"We'll see about it," said Frank, with a sudden chilling fear.

Then he hastily sprang down into the hold. He listened awhile most attentively.

When he came upon deck again, his face was deadly pale.

He touched the alarm gong. In response all rushed out on deck. It needed not a second glance at Frank's face to apprise them that something was wrong.

"My friends," said the young inventor, impressively, "I fear we have to face the most serious disaster that has overtaken us yet."

"Speak up, Frank!" said Floyd hastily. "Don't be afraid to tell us. What is it? Are we—"

"We are sinking fast!"

For a moment silence of the most deadly, oppressive description prevailed.

Then Captain Daniel said:

"Messmates, let us meet our fate like men. Davy Jones' locker ain't the worst place to lie! Can nothing be done, Frank?"

"We can take to the boat," said Frank, "but we are hundreds of miles from land, and the chance of being picked up by a vessel is remote."

"Well," said Floyd, finally, "if we must give up the ship, let us perpetuate our lives as long as we can. It will be no worse to go down in the rowboat than aboard the ship."

This was true.

"Pick up such effects as you can carry and need," said Frank. "Launch the boat at once!"

Barney and Pomp hastened to obey the command.

The boat was quickly in the water.

The Search was settling fast. The water had reached her machinery, and she lay helplessly water-logged.

It was but a moment's work for the voyagers to embark.

They were able to pull scarcely a hundred yards away when the Search went down. Down into ocean depths, never to be raised again.

For a time what seemed like an awful pall settled down upon the castaways.

All sat gloomily in the bottom of the boat. No effort was made to row. It was useless.

All that could be done was to drift and trust to luck in meeting a ship or reaching land.

The first squall would send them to the bottom. Their lives hung upon the slenderest thread yet.

Darkness settled down.

After a time exhausted nature yielded and they slept. Something woke Frank, he never knew what.

But starting up suddenly he saw lights flashing before him. He heard a hoarse voice say:

"Avast there, starboard watch. Hold your lantern. It's a rowboat as I told ye. Lay by and take 'em aboard!"

Ten minutes later the castaways were aboard a Hawaiian steamer and en route to San Francisco. The end of their adventures was reached.

This ends our story. Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp returned to Readestown safely.

Floyd and Muriel went on to Vancouver by steamer and were happily married. Captain Daniel went home and retired from the sea forever.

But this tale of the underground sea is fresh in the memory of all, and they will not soon forget their experiences aboard a submarine boat with Frank Reade, Jr., the inventor.

[THE END.]

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